**Counting to the Killing**

Michael L. Scheiwe

image born with rising mists, mists rising from the warming marsh

the image leapt full blown from my mind into my mind’s eye, mind’s ear, into heart of mind as I squeezed the trigger on the big gun, curtain of rising mist gradually revealing marsh grasses of the nest site, their long crane legs, their rounded abdomens, their long faintly curved necks upon which each head surely rested but did not appear before the shocking shot blew them apart and away and down upon the moist earth where they died, one quickly the other thrashing, wildly painting with snake-necked strokes broad sheets of red, dark red upon the rattling marsh grasses, swirling red within the waters of their springtime home; eddied mist now swirling about the scene into which I ran, to them I ran, their bodies eaten by my mind, the saliva running, my legs and feet running, gathering them in my arms, their large bodies, warm and sticky red and ruined.

one slid and slumped away, the other I gathered beneath my arm against my body its legs tangling with mine, its neck and head extended aloft, turning with it, showing it to the sky, the sky from which they had come, the sky that had brought them to me, the sky from which I had taken them, I asked for understanding, I praised them—their beauty and grace, I asked for strength, I praised them—their fortitude and knowledge, I begged the sky to permit my heart to beat again, and turning full circle I began to cry and dance with this bird in my grasp held tightly, I began to call to the marsh the grasses the water, round and round swirling looking down looking up calling as loudly as I could, ululating to the sky, with this crane, with this crane now dead that I had killed, its neck alongside my neck, its beak held straight tapering to its tip at the tips of my fingers, I danced spinning and singing, singing and singing and spinning, mist rising into the morn, my heart beating through me into it and danced and sang and cried body to body, sang to the sky, my feet thrashing the marshy water to a froth, mist rising swirling, clearly we sang and danced, jumping, leaping high, bodies touching necks rubbing wings reaching and embracing, singing to the sky please allow us to rise into the sky, singing to the mist, rising, eddying, springing, higher and higher, outstretched wings rustling pinion to pinion to pinion